

Message Text

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ACTION SS-25

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USSAG

C O N F I D E N T I A L PHNOM PENH 1028

EXDIS

FROM AMBASSADOR

E.O.11652: GDS

TAGS: MOPS EAID CB

SUBJECT: MEKONG CONVOY

1. WHILE MOST OF MY RECENT MESSAGES HAVE DEALT WITH INTERNAL KHMER POLITICAL AFFAIRS, SUGGESTIONS ON HOW TO MOVE TOWARD A COMPROMISE SOLUTION HERE, THE INADEQUACY OF PRESENT AID LEVELS AND POSSIBLE TACTICS FOR RECEIVING SUPPLEMENTAL APPROPRIATIONS FROM CONGRESS, ACTUALLY ALL MEMBERS OF THIS MISSION HAVE SPENT MOST OF THEIR TIME ON THE PRESSING MILITARY PROBLEMS FACING THE KHMER REPUBLIC.

2. THE NEXT 48-72 HOURS WILL BE CRUCIAL FOR CAMBODIA BECAUSE THEY WILL DETERMINE WHETHER THE LARGE-SCALE ECONOMIC AND MILITARY ASSISTANCE MADE AVAILABLE TO THE GKR CAN ACTUALLY BE BROUGHT UP THE MEKONG RIVER TO PHNOM PENH. IF THE ENEMY SUCCEEDS IN CLOSING THE MEKONG FROM THE VIETNAMESE BORDER UP TO PHNOM PENH, HE WILL HAVE ACHIEVED HIS PRIMARY OBJECTIVE IN THIS DRY SEASON: TO STRANGLE THE GKR BY PREVENTING ESSENTIAL COMMODITIES FROM REACHING THE CAPITAL.

3. DURING THE FIRST WEEK OF JANUARY, THE FANK HAD DONE A GOOD JOB IN BLUNTING THE ENEMY OFFENSIVE IN THE PHNOM
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PENH AREA. THE KC TRIED TO BREACH THE FANK DEFENSIVE

LINE IN THE PHNOM PENH PERIMETER, BUT FOUND NO HOLE. WE NOW ESTIMATE THAT THE ENEMY HAD AS MANY AS 8,000 CASUALTIES IN THAT EFFORT AROUND PHNOM PENH.

4. HOWEVER, THE FANK DID NOT HAVE SUFFICIENT FORCES TO DEFEND PHNOM PENH AND AT THE SAME TIME REINFORCE THE ISOLATED OUTPOSTS LOCATED AT THE CHOKE POINTS ON THE MEKONG RIVER WHICH PROTECTED RIVER TRAFFIC MOVING FROM THE VIETNAMESE BORDER TO PHNOM PENH. MANY OF THESE ISOLATED FANK GARRISONS WERE OVERRUN AND FURING THE LAST TWO WEEKS THE ENEMY HAS DUG IN AND BROUGHT UP HEAVY WEAPONS TO SHELL CONVOYS WHICH WILL TRY TO RUN THE GAUNTLET. OUR CURRENT ESTIMATES ARE THAT THE ENEMY HAS 41 BATTALIONS ON THE LOWER MEKONG. PHOTOGRAPHY REVEALS THAT SOME BARRICADES HAVE BEEN CONSTRUCTED AND THAT TNEMY POSITIONS ON THE MEKONG ARE WELL FORTIFIED.

5. ONCE THE PHNOM PENH MILITARY SITUATION WAS BROUGHT UNDER CONTROL BY FANK, IT SHIFTED SOME ASSETS (MORE THAN 3 BATTALIONS) TO THE NEAK LOEUNG ENCLAVE FROM WHERE LANDING ATTEMPTS WILL BE MADE TO RETAKE SOME OF THE VITAL STRATEGIC POSITIONS ON THE MEKONG BANKS. THESE LANDINGS WILL BE MADE TODAY, JAN 18, UNDER WHAT WE HOPE WILL BE MASSIVE KHMER AIR SUPPORT. THE WEATHER HAS NOT BEEN HELPFUL, SINCE WE HAVE HAD UNSEASONAL HEAVY RAINS IN THE MORNING, PREVENTING THE TAKEOFF OF PLANES FROM PHNOM PENH, THEREBY THROWING THE TIME TABLE OFF SCHEDULE. TODAY'S EFFORTS TO RETAKE SOME OF THESE CHOKE POINTS BY AMPHIBIOUS LANDINGS WERE PRECEDED BY HEAVY KAF AIR STRIKES YESTERDAY.

6. UNLESS THERE IS A LAST MINUTE CHANGE, THE FIRST CONVOY WILL TRY TO PUNCH THROUGH TOMORROW, SUNDAY, JAN 19. IT IS IMPERATIVE THAT THIS CONVOY REACH PHNOM PENH. THE KHMERS ALL KNOW IT -- BOTH FRIENDLY AND ENEMY -- AS WELL AS THIS MISSION. EQUALLY KEENLY ARE THE EYES OF THE PRESS FOCUSSED ON THESE DEVELOPMENTS, AND WE MIGHT AS WELL BRACE OURSELVES FOR SOME RATHER SENSATIONALIZED REPORTING FROM HERE IF THE CONVOY RECEIVES SIGNIFICANT DAMAGE, OR EVEN
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WORSE, IF IT IS TURNED BACK. MUCH WILL DEPEND ON THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE KHMER AIR FORCE TO PROVIDE AIR COVER AS THE RELATIVELY SHORT AND SWIFT CONVOY MAKES ITS WAY UP THE RIVER TO PHNOM PENH.

7. A LOT OF PLANNING HAS GONE INTO THIS EXERCISE WHICH I PREFER NOT TO RELATE IN THIS MESSAGE. A MORE DETAILED SUMMARY OF THIS OPERATIONAL PLANNING AND THE

REASONING BEHIND IT MAY BE FOUND IN A MESSAGE
(171130Z JAN 75) FROM USSAG, NAKHOM PHANOM, THAILAND
TO CINCPAC WHICH WAS REPEATED TO THE DEPARTMENT.
I DO WANT YOU TO KNOW, HOWEVER, THE PRIDE I FEEL IN BEING
PART OF THIS GROUP OF 200 DEDICATED AMERICANS WHO ARE
WORKING AROUND THE CLOCK TO HELP OUR KHMER FRIENDS IN
MEETING THIS SUPREME CHALLENGE. IN THIS CONNECTION I
SHOULD LIKE TO PAY PARTICULAR TRIBUTE TO THE PROFESSIONAL
SKILL AND DEDICATED EFFORT WHICH BG WILLIAM W. PALMER,
CHIEF OF MEDTC, HAS DISPLAYED DURING THIS TRYING PERIOD.
HE AND HIS TEAM, AS WELL AS THE DEFENSE ATTACHE AND HIS
STAFF, HAVE PERFORMED EFFICIENTLY AND WELL.

8. WE WILL BE IN A BETTER POSITION BY MONDAY TO
DETERMINE WHETHER THE MEKONG WILL BE OPEN TO CONVOY
TRAFFIC OR, IN CASE OF AILURE, WHAT OTHER STEPS
NEED TO BE TAKEN TO KEEP THE GKR ALIVE.
DEAN

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